

The Steps of the path to Liberation The Noble Eightfold Path

The Buddha's message that leads to get rid of unsatisfactoriness and achieve real happiness is very clear. It is well expounded (*Svākkhāto*), directly visible (*Sanditthiko*), immediately effective (*Akālika*), calling one to come and see (*Ehipassiko*), leading onwards (*Opanaiko*), to be personally realized by the wise (*Paccattam Veditabbo Vinnuhi*). To achieve final bliss of liberation, we have to listen to the Buddha's message with good attention for our knowledge. At the very first level in Buddhism, the knowledge is very important. Buddhism compares knowledge as wealth (*Suta Dhanam*). To achieve all kinds of results such as intelligence that Buddhism teaches knowledge plays a major role. It is not only enough knowledge but reflecting on it again and again is also very important. Furthermore, we have to practice it in our daily life as morality (*Seela*) and meditation (*Bhavana*). All doctrines that focus on liberation can be included in three steps; discipline, tranquility and wisdom.

When we practice the Buddha's message, our intelligence which causes us to overcome suffering grows gradually. Intelligence or wisdom (*Sammā Ditthi*) that Buddhism explains can be divided into two. The first step of intelligence is the understanding of the karmic law. Here we have a clear knowledge about the Karmic force that when we do some activities with wicked mind, we will have bad results because of polluted mind. Simultaneously, when we do something with pure mind, we will have fruitful results because of pure mind. When a person has this knowledge, he doesn't like to suffer doing bad deeds with wicked mind. He always tries to get rid of bad deeds and develop good deeds with pure mind in the name of real happiness. He does these things not only for happiness of next birth, but in this life itself. This intelligent person always practices generosity, virtue and meditation as much as he can. When we do these three meritorious deeds, our positive karmic energy grows up. Strong positive karmic energy can decrease some of our previous negative karmic results. And it can improve our fruitful previous karmic energy too. The fast and easiest way to improve our positive energy is that practicing meditation.

The second step of intelligence is the understanding of cause and effect (*Paticca-samuppāda*), the dependent origination. This is the main teaching or the unique teaching in Buddhism. We get experience through our senses such as eyes, ears, nose... When we see, hear or smell something, it means five aggregates (Forms, feelings, perception, mental formations and consciousness) arise together and cease at the moment. When reasons (conditions) are separated, the experience ceases. The main reason of suffering is unknowing of arising the five aggregates. All sufferings can be included in these five aggregates. That is why Buddhism says; **in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering"**

(*Samkittenapancupādānakkhandā dukkhā* - සංවිත්තේන පඤ්චුපාදානක්ඛන්ධා දුක්ඛා). The highest intelligence in Buddhism is the intelligence of the five aggregates that "Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence, being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence" (*Ahutvā Sambhutam Hutvā na Bhavissati* - අහුත්වා සම්භුතං හුත්වා න භවිස්සති). If we can understand this ultimate truth of the five aggregates practicing insight meditation which is the only get rid of suffering. Then we live completely in the present moment seeing arising and ceasing our experiences.

Arising and ceasing of all experiences in our life is the world reality according to the ultimate truth whether we like or not, and whether we know or not. Unknowing (or ignorance) of cause and effect is the main cause of suffering. If somebody has this knowledge, he tries to overcome suffering practicing the Buddha's message. He may find the path to this goal. The path of purification is the Noble Eight Fold Path. For the real happiness and getting rid of suffering this is the only path.

1. Right Understanding (*Sammā ditti*)

The main cause of suffering is ignorance or delusion (*Avijja*). If we like to overcome suffering or unsatisfactoriness, we have to reduce ignorance. Right understanding is the opposite of ignorance. As much as we listen to the Buddha's message and reflect on it, we can develop right understanding. This understanding causes us to go on the path getting rid of suffering towards the final goal.

When we practice the path that leads to purify our mind, we should have the correct knowledge about the world and ourselves. As it is mentioned before, the first step of right understanding is the confidence of karmic law. It means when we do good deeds with pure mind, we will have the good results and when we do bad deeds with wicked mind, we will have the bad results because of polluted mind. The second step of right understanding is the understanding of dependent origination. It means understanding of impermanence. That is; when conditions are together, the experience arises and when the conditions cease, the experience also ceases. According to this view, the impermanence which is taught in Buddhism is the understanding of arising and ceasing of our experience through our senses. If someone has this understanding, he puts an earnest to purify his mind from negative thoughts because he doesn't like to suffer any more. He continues to the second step.

2. Right Thoughts/ Intension (*Sammā samkappa*)

According to right understanding, further we are not ready to suffer. That is why we are going to purify our mind from unwholesome or negative thoughts such as desire and hatred. We are always sensitive and watchful when the thoughts come to our mind whether they are good or bad. Here, we know very well that when negative thoughts such as anger, desire, jealousy, etc. come to our mind, we suffer or worry. And when positive thoughts such as kindness, friendliness, compassion, generosity, etc. come to our mind, our mind is pure, calm, quiet, peaceful and happy. That is why we always try to live with right thoughts because of right understanding.

3. Right Speech (*Sammā vācā*)

Then he goes further along the path. Now he is ready to control his speech too. When he tells something, he reflects on it again and again whether it is correct or not. Here he avoids false, backbiting, rush and rubbish words for the sake of happiness. He practices the discipline in speech. He always protects the consistency of speech in all his life.

4. Right Action (*Sammā kammanta*)

He has not only verbal discipline but he has behavioral discipline as well. Here he abstains from stealing, killing living beings and having sexual misconduct. Because of right understanding, he knows very well, when he has those bad actions, he has to face the inevitable consequences and knows how it leads to more suffering in the long-run. That is why he gets rid of those activities. He wishes a pleasant, calm happy life.

5. Right Livelihood (*Sammā ājīva*)

Further he goes on the path of satisfactoriness. He engages in right livelihood and always attempts to do righteous jobs leaving wrong jobs such as killing animals, selling drugs and poisons. As the result of these good activities his happiness gradually increases. Because of right understanding, he applies his correct knowledge for all his activities. He never forgets his spiritual goals even though he lives in complex and difficult situations, because he always lives in the righteous way with right understanding.

6. Right Effort (*Sammā vāyāmā*)

And his courage develops to do good and to get rid of bad. Especially, here we make sure not to give rise to bad deeds that are not yet arisen in us, and try to give up bad things that already we

do. Further, we try to initiate good things that we haven't started yet and try to keep developing good that we are already doing. It means we are on the way to happiness.

7. Right Mindfulness (*Sammā sati*)

Here he does all his activities with mindfulness. He knows very well that when he loses his mindfulness, he loses his happiness. Therefore he always does everything mindfully and reflects on his feelings, mind and mental formations with awareness. Mindfulness in Buddhism is a major quality that we have to practice. And it is the center of all kinds of spiritual factors. All kinds of doctrines in Buddhism can be included into mindfulness. Mindfulness is divided into four as;

- The contemplation of body (*Kāyānupassanā*)
- The contemplation of feelings (*Vedanānupassanā*)
- The contemplation of mind (*Cittānupassanā*)
- The contemplation of mental formations (*Dhammānupassanā*)

Practicing mindfulness is highly praised in Buddhism. All Buddhist teachings can be included into one topic that is mindfulness. Our spiritual success and real happiness depend on how far we have practiced mindfulness in our lives. Practicing Buddhism means practicing mental culture. Practicing mental culture means practicing mindfulness. Also, practicing mindfulness means practicing happiness. Finally, we can say very clearly practicing of all teachings of the Buddha means practicing mindfulness. The entire dispensation of the Buddha depends on practicing mindfulness. That is why Buddhism illustrates the one and only way;

for the purification of beings (*Sattānam visuddhiyā*),

for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation (*sokapariddavānam samatikkhamāya*),

for the destruction of pain and grief (*dukkhadomanassānam attamgamāya*),

for the gaining of knowledge (*nāyassa adhigamāya*)

for the attaining or realization of nibbana or enlightenment (*nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya*)

is practicing the fourfold mindfulness.

According to practicing mindfulness in these four areas, we develop our attention and awareness about our body and mind. And we practice our attention to live in the present moment consciously. We mostly suffer because of the past or the future. If we lose our mindfulness about the present, it means we lose our happiness. That is why Buddhism emphasizes here the importance of developing mindfulness.

8. Right Tranquility (*Sammā samādhī*)

Furthermore, practicing his mind by meditation, he always tries to keep his mind away from defilements such as desire, anger and delusion. Here, he is clever to keep his mind for a long time with wholesome thoughts. His mind is pure, calm and quiet like clear water in a well.

Learned disciple practice the noble eightfold path with understanding of the dependent origination. Hence when mind is concentrated, he sees the world reality as it is (*Samahito Bhikkhave yatabhutam pajanathi*). With this concentrated mind, he reflects on the impermanence, suffering and egolessness (or selflessness) again and again. The understanding of three characteristics of existence grows up every moment when we are on the path to purification. As the result of practicing this correct path, gradually he reaches to the ultimate liberation of the mind. And he reaches other two steps too which are '**the right knowledge of suffering**' (*Sammā Nāna*) and '**the right liberation of suffering**' (*Sammā Vimutti*). When we are on this path, we can see the results in our life that we are growing with honesty, loving kindness and wisdom.

If we are on the real path of purification, day by day, moment by moment we are going forward on this eight fold path. It means, avoiding suffering we are reaching to liberation and happiness.

The Buddha explains that this is the direct path, this is the noble path, and this is the real path to cease from suffering, sorrow, sickness, death, old age and lamentation. If we are intelligent, honest, kind for beings and have faith in the Buddha's enlightenment, we can go-along this path.



May the Triple Gem Bless You!

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May All Beings Be Well, Happy & Peaceful!

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